

Roy's Sermon for November 7, 2021

1 Peter 3:15b-20a: 'The Conscience. Noah And The Spirits. And Men Are Without Excuse!'

Last Sunday's message was from 1 Peter 3:13-15a 'Fear God. And Our Hope Is All About Jesus!' V13 "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" "Eager to do good" in the context of the passage and the church, "eager to pursue peace." Yes doing all that we can to make right those differences and difficulties with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And more broadly speaking in the context of the world, being beyond reproach, in our conduct and testimony about Him who saved us! V14 "But even if you should suffer for what is right you are blessed." So in the church, if our efforts to be reconciled are in vain, we "are blessed" because we walk in the steps of Jesus. We suffer for what is right. And in the world, if our true testimony about our Saviour brings persecution and condemnation down upon our heads, in this too "we are blessed." Because 2 Timothy 3:12: "In fact everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

So if, (not we ourselves personally, but Jesus truth in us about Him offends the unsaved world, or indeed the wayward brother or sister) so be it. And praise God we say. Because we are not chameleons who have blended into world so that it has embraced us as its own. No, we must not fear men, but God! V14. "Do not fear what they fear." Ecclesiastes 10:13 "Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole duty of man."

V15a "but in your heart set apart Christ as Lord." I said we enthrone "Him in our hearts" by knowing Him. By setting apart time each day to be in His Word. By adhering to and by being transformed by that Word. As we set Jesus to be Ruler and Lord of our life and our heart!

And finally, V15 "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." 1 Peter 1:3: We have "a living hope." No our hope is not dead but living, because Jesus lives! The tomb was empty. The power of death, which is judgement for sin, was defeated at the cross. Yes our hope is living because Jesus lives and Jesus saves. It's all about Jesus!

And now we pick up the letter this morning: 1 Peter 3:15b-20a "The Conscience, Noah And The Spirits, And "Men Are Without Excuse"! V15 "but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asked you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. V16: "Keeping a clear conscience." Yes, "but do this with gentleness and respect." But what is it that we should do with "gentleness and respect?" Well it's "giving a reason for the hope that we have."

Brothers and sisters, next to "living a godly life" in the sight of the Almighty God whom we claim to serve, what is the true goal of the genuine Christian? It is giving testimony in word and deed, "for the hope that we have" in that Almighty God! Yes, our reason for being, as part of God's church on earth, is to point people to Him and what He has done through that grace, which was poured out upon us by the death of His One and "only begotten Son" Jesus. As I said last time, it's all about Jesus! He is the true reason for our hope. And we are to do this, "with gentleness and respect."

But in some ways, this almost seems at odds with the message that we are to proclaim. Matthew 3:7 "But when he saw many of the Sadducees and Pharisees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them, "You brood of Vipers. Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Nothing "respectful and gentle" about that. And Jesus Himself called the religious elite "You brood of Vipers."

“White washed tombs.” “Snakes.” And “hypocrites” on many occasions. He also overturned the tables of the money changes in righteous anger in the courtyard of the temple. No, on those occasions, both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself had not respect for men, but for God!

So how do we marry the preaching and declaration of the uncompromising message, that God's judgement is going to fall upon you because of your sin. So repent, or be cast into hell, which both John and Jesus Himself preached, yes how do we marry that, with, “but do this with gentleness and respect?” May I suggest that it has all got to do with the context! One is uncompromisingly preaching without fear the Word of God. While the other is seeking to give an answer, (to testify, on let's say a personal level) yes to give an answer for the cause and the root of our faith and our hope!

When I had first become a Christian, I was more than happy to declare the fire and brimstone of God without fear, thought or consequence. Now don't get me wrong. There is indeed a place for this. And the sad truth is, that from many a pulpit or lectern today, that bold declaration, that unashamed preaching of the uncompromised full council of God's Word, is sadly lacking and almost absent in much of Australia today! But in a one to one situation, or some small group, in which people are genuinely asking about the “faith and hope that we have” and why we possess that “hope” “gentleness and respect,” are going to be far more powerful weapons, than a thoughtless blurting out of, you had better turn to God, or you are going to burn in hell!

Yes friends, it's all about the context. “Wise as serpents and gentle as doves,” Jesus said in Matthew 10:16b. So be discerning and aware. Because each situation may call for a different approach. Not a compromise of your faith or God's Truth, but a different approach as you seek to honour and glorify God to others! V16. “Keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

Beloved, the only way that our “conscience” can be truly clear, is by us always speaking the truth, and having no hypocrisy in us. We fear not men but God. We cannot be like that ancient mask wearing actor Hupokrites. Remember, no one knew what he looked like because in his performances, he was always wearing a different kind of mask. We must mean what we say and say what we mean. And live what we profess. “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.” The scripture says. Yes be a straight shooter. A person of integrity, because we are called to be beyond reproach.

1 Timothy 1:19 says, “holding onto faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and have made shipwreck of their faith.” Brethren, the “conscience” of the Christian, is that through which God the Holy Spirit, guides us in the light of His Word. So “keeping a clear conscience” then, must be listening to an abiding by that Voice of God, as He speaks to us from within. And we listened to Him speak to us, having opened up the scriptures. Because that is how God speaks to us today! So if we abide by God's Voice in the scriptures, our integrity will remain intact, despite what the enemies of Jesus say against us! And friends, they are the enemies of Jesus be not mistaken. “Do not be surprised if they hate you. It's not you that they hate but me.” Jesus said. And also, “they hated me first.”

Yes “our conscience” will be clear and our Christian integrity remain intact whatever they say against us. Though Christ's enemies seek to shame us, their slanderous speech will fall upon their own heads, as our upright conduct “heaps burning coals” upon them! V17: “It is better if it is God's will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

Friends, six times now so far in this letter, Peter has referred to “doing good.” And the “doing good” is always about our testimony as we are abiding by the scriptures and living them out, as they have permeated our lives! And now this is the second time that it is about “suffering for doing good” in

direct reference to reflecting the actions of Jesus. "It is better if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." Clearly then, Peter is telling us, that though God be the Sovereign Ruler over all things, this does not mean that He is going to keep us from suffering in this life for His sake. We might suffer in our bodies and in our emotional life to give glory to Him. We might suffer in our relationships and our reputation to give glory to Him. And we might suffer in this life at the hands of others, (friends, family, co-workers, governments and authorities) simply because we boldly declare who we are in Jesus, in word and deed. Yes simply because we are unashamedly claiming the Name of Him who saved us!

And now again Peter basically reiterates what he said in chapter 2:20b-21: "But if you suffer for doing good and endure it this is commendable before God. (And why?) Because to this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." And now in v17. Of chapter 3 "it is better to suffer if it is God's will for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all. The righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." Yes Jesus suffered for you, Peter again says. He keeps reminding us doesn't he, why we should do what he is telling us to do. Yes this is what Jesus did for you, so you must set the Cross always before you and not look back!

Beloved, is the world becoming a better place for Christians to live in? No. No and a million times no. For the sexually immoral and depraved, yes. For lawbreakers and the unscrupulous yes. For idolatrous false God worshippers, yes. Listen to Paul's words in Romans 1:28-32: "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful, they invent ways of doing evil, they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them." yes "although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, (deserve the fires of hell he means) they not only continue to do those very things but also approve of those who practise them."

No Brethren, for the believer the world is not becoming a better place to live in. It is the sewer of human depravity and its abominations in the sight of God. But He will not tolerate sin forever. And friends, here is the sober reality for us all: the scripture says, "For such as these, some of you once were." Yes as wicked and debauched as these days in which we live are, they are the fields that we have been harvested out of. And are still the mission fields at hand for us all! God's People, the people for whom Jesus died are in this cesspool of humanity. And they need to hear the gospel! We are called to hate the sin and love and pray for the Sinner! V 18b-20a: "he was put to death in the body but made alive in by the Spirit, through whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."

Now brothers and sisters, there are a bunch of out there theories and speculations, that this verse has given rise to over the last 2000 years. There is the notion, that Jesus went to hell, where the fallen angels have been imprisoned. That they are the "spirits" which are spoken of here. But is the gospel for celestial beings or for lost humanity? No, Jesus came as man and died as a man for His people! There is also the idea that while he was in the tomb, Jesus` Spirit, (the Holy Spirit) went and preached to those people who were wiped out during the flood, because they didn't get to hear the New Testament gospel message. And there are still other speculations that I don't even try to get my head around. But none of these things make any sense or ring biblically and theologically true!

Now the notion that Jesus had to descend to the place where the lost dead souls are kept and wait for judgement, because if He did not, it would in some way be unfair for God to judge those who again, had not heard the New Testament gospel message of salvation, rings counter to all biblical teaching! As we all know, Jesus said, "No one comes to the father except by me." And when He says "no one." He means no one before the Old Testament and New Testament, and "no one" after the Old Testament and New Testament.

The point in case is Job! Now most scholars agree, that Job, if not the first, was one of the very first books of the Bible that was ever written. There was no written law. Nor were there any scrolls of the Old Testament or New Testament yet in existence. An yet Job`s Holy Spirit breathed, yes his "God breathed" understanding of Jesus as Intercessor and Redeemer and of the physical Resurrection, is both astounding and mind-blowing! Although in despair, (and due to his terrible situation having lost his family and wealth, that were unequalled in his day) and believing now that somehow God is his enemy.

We read in Job 16:12-21: "All was well with me, but he shattered me, he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. Again and again he bursts upon me, he rushes at me like a warrior. I have sewed sackcloth over my skin and buried my brow in the dust. My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes, yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure. O earth, do not cover my blood, may my cry never be laid to rest. Even now my witness is in heaven, my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God, as a man pleads for his friend."

Yes "even now my witness is in heaven. My advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God, on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend." And also in chapter 19:14-27 when he feels that he can't take it anymore, God the Holy Spirit visits him with yet another astounding vision of Jesus! It's the picture of Redemption and Resurrection. Of Jesus as King and Redeemer and Ruler of all things. "My kinsman have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and maidservants count me a stranger, they look upon me as an alien. I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife, I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even the little boys scorn me, when I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me, those I love have turned against me. I am nothing but skin and bones, I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh? Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever. I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, I will see him with mine own eyes, I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."

Yes I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." But how can God judge those who haven't heard the gospel? This is the charge that is thrown at Christians. But again Job had no scriptures. He was a contemporary of Abraham's. And obviously, he knew God! In chapter 1, to Satan, God says, "Have you considered my servant job? There is no one on earth like him. A man who fears God and shuns evil." But yet again, he had no scriptures through which he could know God.

How can this be? Brothers and sisters, here is the thing: that all of humanity, as far as being accountable to God as their Creator, for their actions of rebellion and sin in his sight, "are without

excuse.” In Romans 1:18-25 we read: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised Amen.” Yes, “so that men are without excuse.” So the concept of the unfairness of God, doesn't exist.

Well then, what does “through whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built,” actually mean? The only thing which rings true, and is in accordance with biblical theological teaching, is this: Hebrews 13:8 says that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever”. So then, God is unchangeable, and His message of salvation and forgiveness of sin is the same. Come to me in repentance for forgiveness! This has always been God's message to his ungrateful people. “Return to me and I will return to you.” Yes come to me with repentance in your heart, and you will find me a forgiving Father. But it has always been, through Christ Alone, since the creation of the world!

And in the same way even as it has been for thousands of years, that Christ`s missionaries have travelled to the farthest reaches of the corners of the world. Where there were no scriptures. Only different languages and peoples and oftentimes with nothing but a Holy Spirit filled heart. And the scriptures and their testimony of God and who He is, and what He requires of us! Yes they preached in Christ`s Name through the Holy Spirit. Yes it was The Spirit of God then who preached of Christ through them!

Well so too, as Noah built that ark for 120 years, while suffering the ridicule, the contempt and the condemnation from the whole of the then known world. The Holy Spirit was preaching to those people through His servant Noah`s faithful labourers, of the coming, of the judgement of God!

Friends, 2 Peter 2:5 speaks of Noah as “a preacher of righteousness.” Beloved, what does righteousness mean? Other than to be made right with God. And how does this happen? Only through the preaching about, and the people`s accepting of Jesus! As I have explained before. All of Noah`s sermons are nowhere to be found. And why? He preached not with his lips. But with a “clear conscience,” and the faithful labours of his hands! And while ever he did so, the Holy Spirit was proclaiming through those labours, for men to flee to the ark and escape the coming judgement of God! Yes flee to Him for safety and forgiveness and all would be well.

But did they come? No. The animals listen to God's Voice but humanity was deaf, dumb and blind to the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nothing has changed! Yes Beloved, when Jesus` servants speak or declare His truth within their lives, like the gospel itself through the Holy Spirit, they hold out heaven and hell! But even if no one goes, the Creation itself proclaims the glory and the majesty and the eternal qualities and the divine nature of God. “So that men are without excuse.” Peter is simply saying that in effect, all peoples around the world and throughout all ages have heard the gospel message of God. Even from the time of Noah on. Yes whenever they were

born, and wherever they have lived. "Men are without excuse." Yes judgement is coming "and men are without excuse."

Dear friends, do those who have died, get some kind of second opportunity to come to God? No. No there is no kind of purgatory that we can be purchased out of, even by Christ. No second Providence from God to be saved. When death finds each member of humanity, God's decision has already been pronounced. Only heaven or hell awaits us! Beloved, a clear conscience before God in our service and declarations of Him. We see all of this in Noah. Not a perfect man but a faithful one. He preached with his life. Let us seek to do the same. And God will call His people. Because humanity remains "without excuse" and apart from Jesus without hope!

Let`s Pray!